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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL
PARKS, HISTORIC PRESERVATION AND RECREATION, SENATE COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES, CONCERNING THE FUTURE OF THE
NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM AND THE ABILITY OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
TO CARRY OUT ITS RESPONSIBILITIES WELL INTO THE 21ST CENTURY.

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Mr. Chairman, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the health and well-being of the National Park System as we near the 21st Century. This is a subject that has been of great concern to me for the past four years and has been the focus of my work as Director. This year, 1997, marks the 125th anniversary of Yellowstone National Park, the first national park not only in this country but in the world. At the end of this Administration we will enter a new millennium. Much has happened since Yellowstone was established and it is fitting that we spend the next few years preparing to meet the challenges that are before us in the new century.

Thirty years ago the "Mission 66" campaign was completed in which a major investment in the National Park System's infrastructure occurred. Mission 66 was a ten-year effort aimed at revitalizing and improving the National Park System for its next half century. Since the 1960s, the system has grown extensively with many park units having been established closer to population centers and in urban areas. Visitation to the parks and competition for use of the parks have dramatically increased. The role of the National

Park Service has evolved from one being primarily focused on visitor services to one focused equally on resource preservation so as to ensure that future generations of Americans, not just the current generation, are able to enjoy the natural wonders and cultural treasures for which our national park areas have been set aside. During that same period of time the fiscal needs and concerns of the United States have been evolving. The nation's debt is of critical concern to this Administration and the Congress and balancing the federal budget is a central issue. The financial needs of the National Park System are a part of that discussion and will be affected by it.

The issue before us today is how do we ensure that the National Park Service has the resources it needs and uses those resources most efficiently to carry out its mission and mandate for protecting and preserving the National Park System for the use and enjoyment of future generations of Americans well into the 21st century. I believe to accomplish our mission there are four basic themes we should focus on: the funding that is necessary, the people that are needed, the work that must be done, and the partnerships we must have.

FUNDING TO ACCOMPLISH THE MISSION

The mission of the National Park Service is chartered to be a

combination of resource protection and enjoyment by the public. While resource protection is mandated, statistically, we as a nation have failed to preserve and protect our parks to a degree measured by the backlog of construction and rehabilitation needs. I believe we need a long-term campaign to restore what has been lost. The beginning is recognizing that one of the causes for our current condition is thinking only in traditional budgetary terms. We must change this thinking before the failure is unremediable.

Let me explore the options to restore our damaged system. First, there is the conventional budget. I believe it will continue to be the responsibility of Congress to provide the major financial resources to properly manage and operate the National Park System. As I have said before, there is no escaping the truth that if you want parks, you have to pay for them. While we will continue to rely on Congress for a large part of our funding, we need a number of mechanisms, which together can help us properly manage these important natural and cultural resources.

I believe it is time that we seriously discuss the need for a special capital budget - such as a Restore the Parks Fund - to address some of the problems associated with a decaying infrastructure. Although we will have to review this concept more thoroughly, such a fund could be similar to the effort undertaken with Mission 66. This fund should supplement and not replace our

existing line-item construction program provided through annual appropriations. This fund should have a predictable and constant stream of revenue dedicated to park improvements. Admission fees, recreation user fees, and concessions revenues are obvious sources for this fund. The money should be dedicated solely to this use, be reliable and remain available without any offsets or siphoning off for other unrelated purposes. Money collected or earned in the parks should be used to restore the parks.

Congress took a step towards making this possible with the passage of the fee demonstration legislation. The Administration will follow this lead with proposed legislation that builds upon the current temporary authority and provides permanent authority to collect and spend new receipts on park improvements. We must now maximize the benefits attained from this source of income.

Such an effort must not divert our continued attention to other means of helping to restore the National Park System. The Administration has sent its proposed reauthorization of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) to Congress, which, if enacted, can greatly assist the Service in rebuilding the roads within our parks -- an item that requires significant investment. We also need to carefully consider how our partners and friends, like the National Park Foundation, can assist

us in our common endeavor. Donations from these organizations will further our efforts to educate the next generation about the importance of our mission and the resources we hold in trust for them. Similarly, much attention has been given to a new bonding authority to help respond to the need for capital construction projects. While budgetary and PAYGO concerns must be examined, we should not stop exploring this and other opportunities to restore our parks.

The effort to restore our parks will require catching at full tide the current professed enthusiasm for the mission of the parks. It will require getting past the resistance of those who do not agree that this is important, or do not agree that it is important enough to alter old habits, or do not agree that it is important to pay for it.

THE PEOPLE TO ACCOMPLISH THE MISSION

Managing the National Park System effectively in the 21st Century will require sufficient numbers of people to meet our mission, people with a variety of skills and backgrounds, and adequate training and educational opportunities for employees. We are constantly examining our personnel needs and we believe there are variety of continuing issues that need to be addressed to ensure that we remain effective.

The National Park Service is an active player in the Administration's efforts to reduce the size of the Federal government and make its employees more responsive to the needs of the American people. We recently undertook a major reorganization in which offices were consolidated, some were downsized, and people were shifted from central locations to the parks. There was also a shift in responsibility and decision-making. The primary purpose of the reorganization was to move more employees closer to the resources and to give them greater responsibility for resource care and protection.

One of the things we are learning through the reorganization is that as activities have been decentralized or shifted to the parks, the ability to undertake certain work that is needed has been lessened. With the specialists in the parks, issues of a broader, regional context are not always addressed. We need to examine whether there are adequate numbers of people in central locations to provide services to those who need them. and whether the increased productivity from computers and telecommunications can help us meet our objectives.

Over the last century as the work of the National Park Service has changed our need for seasonal and year-round employees has changed. In the past the Service was predominately focused on seasonal visitor services. Hiring took place in the summer to accommodate

the annual influx of visitors. As our work has evolved and as we have focused more on resources management, our need for employees has changed. Now, resources management, and in many cases, visitor services, is a 12-month-a-year operation. In some cases, seasonal positions have been converted to year-round positions. Limitations on funding force managers to make tough decisions in choosing between hiring permanent staff or seasonals. In many places where visitation has increased and the area is used year-round, there is a need for more personnel, not less.

We also must recognize that even as funding for the National Park Service has increased by about 5 % annually since 1986, much of this has been used up by the increasing costs of these employees and the increasing demands placed on the service. Ten years ago, personnel costs made up 85% of a park s budget. Today that figure is often over 90% with some parks having personnel costs in excess of 95%. Part of this is attributable to the FERS retirement plan, which costs the agency more up front. Like most other agencies, on occasion we have also absorbed all or partial fixed cost increases within existing budgets. Compliance with many important health, safety and environmental laws have added to the challenge of operating the parks within available resources, further reducing superintendents' decision-making flexibility.

As the National Park System has grown and employees are needed

year-round, jobs have become more diverse and our requirements for specialists have grown. We have a need for biologists and other scientists, archaeologists and historians with specialized education, architects skilled in sustainable practices, people with business administration, accounting, and investment backgrounds, educators, civil engineers, and real estate developers. All are needed in addition to the "traditional ranger," the person the public has come to recognize as a symbol of our national parks.

Getting the right people to work in the National Park Service is only part of the job. We must ensure that our managers are able to hire the best qualified people to do the job. Once hired we must guarantee that those in the National Park Service will continue to be able to meet the ever-changing needs of our parks. Having a training program that can provide those who have the ability to do a job with the skills they need is critical. To address this need, the Park Service has identified essential competencies for all career fields. This informs employees of the skills needed to perform their jobs at various levels; to help employees plan their careers; and to enable us to provide the needed training. Unfortunately, training programs are often the first to be cut and requests to increase funds in our budget for training have been denied by Congress. Having people with the right skills in the right jobs can go a long way toward becoming a more effective and cost-efficient organization and is critical if we are to stay

current with our changing world.

WORK TO ACCOMPLISH THE MISSION

The work of the National Park Service has been evolving since the Service was established in 1916. Central to the work is the Service's mission to protect and preserve resources. Our dual mandate of preservation and use sets us apart from many other land managing agencies. The National Park System will never be completed; events in the nation's history will demand commemoration and the Service will be charged with new responsibilities.

It is not only our resources management that has become year-round; our parks are no longer isolated and used solely as vacation destinations. In many cases they serve large urban and local constituencies with greater number of visitors coming year-round. Providing visitor services is continual throughout the year in most parks. Along with more visitors has come an increased need for providing law enforcement and insuring visitor safety and protection.

Our work has also changed as we are required to become more involved with impacts occurring outside of park boundaries that affect the parks. Air quality, water quality, and urban sprawl are three examples that come to mind. Increasing development immediately adjacent to park boundaries impacts our daily work in many regions of the country.

Along with these responsibilities we are faced with the challenges of downsizing government, finding ways of saving money or stretching limited dollars, and finding more efficient and effective strategies to meet our responsibilities. The work that must be done to manage and preserve the system continues. We are faced with serious questions about what work and which tasks are essential, what can be deferred, and what we cannot do. In our effort to streamline and develop our strategic plan, we must recognize that there are limits to what new tasks the National Park Service can take on.

A new National Park Service strategic planning effort is now underway to define our long-term and mid-term goals and objectives and assist us in balancing our two primary missions -- preserving park resources and providing for the public enjoyment and visitor experience of parks. As part of the government-wide activities called for under the Government Results and Performance Act, this planning effort will help us better direct available resources to meet our missions and goals.

Park planning is an activity that is essential to providing park managers and the general public a clear program for how parks are to be managed and developed. Fewer than half of the parks in the system have general management plans less than 15 years old. Our

own planning guideline states that general management plans have a useful life of 15 years. 55 units have no management plans at all. There is at least a seven-year backlog in updating management plans. There is also concern about the kind of planning that is being done, the efficiency of the planning process, and the length of time it takes to do management plans. We are looking at our planning process to ensure that plans are timely, fiscally responsible and provide clear direction for park management and development.

Education and interpretation are basic and central functions of the National Park Service. The National Park System has been referred to as 374 branch campuses of the world's largest university. We pride ourselves on our interpretive and educational programs and are often looked to for leadership by other organizations involved in interpretation. In spite of these accolades, education and interpretive programs are often viewed as expendable when budgets are tight or there is a shortage of personnel. Seasonal education and interpretive programs are especially vulnerable. While many of our partner organizations are assisting us in our education and interpretation programs, we must not depend solely on our friends to finance this basic activity. Education and interpretation effectively delivered instills stewardship in our visitors and the American people. It instills in them a pride and concern for their own heritage and environment and greater understanding of our

nation s varied natural resources and its diverse cultural heritage.

We need trained and qualified educators to implement the program, and we need to become more inclusive in the populations we are serving. We also must ensure that our scholarship and social history are up-to-date and that we are utilizing research in developing our programs. We need to make sure that this aspect of our mission is not shortchanged. Without education and interpretation there will be no understanding by future generations of the resources and their importance nor for the need to protect them in perpetuity.

Technology can be a powerful tool in educating visitors about the parks and in meeting their needs. Computers and telecommunications can be powerful tools in helping park employees increase their productivity and do their work. As more services are provided by computers, our staff can become more efficient. Current technology allows bills to be paid electronically and allows information to be shared quickly. This eliminates the need for unnecessary and duplicative paperwork. The use of computer technology in delivering services, in orienting visitors and potential visitors to the parks, and in improving our accountability for financial and other park resources, will continue to grow. Being prepared with the right equipment and the right people to make the equipment

useful is a challenge not totally met.

As we face these competing challenges, we also find opportunities. The recent flood in Yosemite provides us with an opportunity that may never come again. Now is our chance to remove incompatible facilities and restore the landscape. Because a plan to remove and relocate facilities was in place we are in a position to take advantage of the opportunity nature has given us. This is but one example and we need to be in a position to adapt to changes as they occur and to be flexible in how we work to fulfill our mission.

PARTNERSHIPS TO ACCOMPLISH THE MISSION

The National Park Service and the National Parks are not islands unto themselves working and existing in a vacuum. We cannot manage the national parks alone nor should we. As we approach the 21st Century partnerships take on an increasing importance whether they be with other government agencies, other public entities, nn-profit and for-profit organizations, or educational institutions. All are important for helping accomplish the Service's mission.

You, the members of the Senate and the House are important partners. The decisions you make in funding our parks, in creating new units of the system, in amending our authorities, and in supporting our management will be a strong message to the American

people of the importance of our national parks to the nation.

However, your role does not end when you leave Capitol Hill; you must join with us in being ambassadors for the parks -- in learning about them, visiting them, and speaking about them with your constituents. We need you to be allies and advocates in the communities where parks exist.

There needs to be a good partnership role at the local level between the National Park Service and community leaders to ensure that the parks are seen as integral parts of a community, are able to remain healthy and that there is a sense of good neighbors. We need to reach out to help this along by employing people who understand working with park neighbors and that can communicate the value of a park in a community. But what is essential is a clear understanding of what makes a national park area special and different thus requiring a greater level of protection than many people may understand or see as valuable.

Along with your help, we recognize that opportunities for partnerships exist in many places, and can be utilized for all aspects of accomplishing the Service's mission from managing resources, to developing facilities, to providing programs, to creating new park units. Our partnership programs have been a big success. Volunteers in parks (VIPs) have provided services, expertise, and time in the national parks and have long been

considered valuable partners. We have established a number of key partnerships with not-for-profit organizations, various foundations including the National Park Foundation, various park friends groups, and state and local governments.

We often characterize our national historic preservation program as a model partnership for the nation. We provide a national framework and technical assistance that enables, supports, and empowers state, tribal, and local decision-making. By working with our partners, we have developed national preservation strategies that have protected significant historic resources for over 30 years. Our accomplishments are shared by all of our partners: 56 State Historic Preservation Officers representing state government, 1,000 units of local government, Indian tribes, the President's Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, colleges and universities, other federal agencies, the private sector, and--most importantly--private citizens working to preserve the places that make their communities special.

Our national recreation programs have developed partnerships with all 50 states through the use of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and through the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Planning (SCORP). Through more than 37,000 projects over 2.3 million acres of land have been protected and provide opportunities

for millions of Americans to recreate in state and local parks and recreation facilities. Our rivers and trails conservation assistance program has worked with thousands of groups around the country and has been a catalyst for hundreds of state and local conservation efforts.

Partnerships can include management partnerships, something we are already doing along the Appalachian Trail and with parks in California. There is a good deal of maintenance and research work that is done by contract, along with some historic preservation and archeological work. The enormous growth in heritage areas has allowed us to expand how we work with state and local governments as well as preservation groups. Other opportunities exist, and they will become increasingly important as we move toward the 21st century. The key factor in joining with others is the requirement that any work done by partners meets National Park standards.

CONCLUSION

The American people have chosen their best places for their parks because they have felt themselves to be at their best in them. The ancient phrase 'pursuit of happiness' has always meant a search for a condition more truly human, more largely fulfilled, and we have selected as parks places where we do, indeed, pursue that kind of happiness -- no undifferentiated glee, no frolicking foolishness --

but happiness, as the Founders used that word, to mean something close to what C.S. Lewis meant by 'joy.'

Parks are landscapes and shrines in which we feel wonder and reverence, where we invite each other to consider what it is about America in which we take the greatest pride, and what we Americans are at our best. Pride in our better selves is a good thing; pride in our better places is good too. When we Americans established parks in the Yellowstone, out of the cliffs at Mesa Verde, from the farm fields of Gettysburg, we did so out of patriotism, in patriotic pride that we live in a land where such places exist. Proud that we were a people capable of reserving such places from exploitation, to be retained as common ground.

It is critical that we dedicate ourselves to work together to ensure that the best people and resources are available to maintain and preserve the National Parks so that our nation's common ground is protected and available to bring out the best in the American people.